


A Christmas Reflection

Mary Ann Templeton

It was a spur-of-the-moment trip to Amish country on a cold and gloomy December day. We were in search of a pick-up-truck-load of firewood, planning to have lunch at a favorite Amish restaurant if possible on the way home. It was a simple plan. At the time, I viewed this trip as an opportunity to escape the pre-Christmas rush. I have never forgotten the unexpected experience that was ahead.

The drive into Bitter cold wind and sleet made us glad for the warmth of the truck. Once in Amish country, we began passing numerous buggies with their vinyl front covers snapped down snugly. Families were bundled inside with heavy coats and lap blankets. We passed in silence through the bleak cold weather, but still there was beauty and calmness that surrounded us on those narrow roads.

We were looking for a sign. Finally, after much searching, we saw a small wooden sign by the side of the road that said "Firewood For Sale" with an arrow pointing to another narrow, rutted country road. Several miles farther, we saw another sign: "Firewood for Sale" and "No Sunday Sales" with an arrow pointing up a long lane. A huge barn and farmhouse were ahead. We drove up the lane and then we waited, wondering what to do next.

Eventually a young Amish man came out of the barn beside the house and walked toward us. "Yes, we have firewood for sale. Come this way to see it." The Amish man and my husband walked off together toward the barn. I sat in the truck and looked at the farmhouse. It seemed huge with simple white curtains at every window. I couldn't see any light inside and no activity outside. It was probably just too cold. The last remnants of a large garden were in view on my right.

After a short time, a heavily bundled Amish woman came out of the house. Her head was down against the raw wind and her face was hidden behind a black bonnet. She walked toward our truck. I climbed out as she approached, not really knowing what to expect. "I have homemade bread and fresh eggs for sale," she said. She spoke simply and then waited for my response. "Alright, I could purchase homemade bread and fresh eggs." She motioned and I followed af-

ter her. We crossed the yard and climbed up to the porch. She held the door and motioned for me to come inside her home.

The room we entered was huge and, once inside, seemed quite light from the many windows. I was standing in a large kitchen with a long table, benches, and the biggest stove I had ever seen. As she took off her coat, I noticed that this woman was young and pregnant. "My name is Anne," I offered. "I am Katie," she replied. "The bread is almost baked. You can sit down there." She motioned to a nearby table and chairs. The silence was new to me. I could hear the ticking of a key-wound clock and the occasional giggling of two children as they played together. Everything was clean and in order. No noise, no phone ringing, no television, no games on the computer. Just calm peacefulness. I was in a world of simplicity and peace. The warm aroma of baking bread and the rhythmic ticking of a clock filled the silence. I was amazed to be sitting in an Amish home.

Katie continued kneading more bread and seemed unaware of my presence. I asked: "When is your baby due?" She replied, "In the spring; I went to the doctor last month." I said, "How wonderful." Katie replied simply, "I am blessed." Her reply stood as a testimony of her faith. I continued, "Christmas is just a few weeks away." Katie looked at me and said, "Yes, we are ready." There seemed to be absolute assuredness that everything was fine. She was ready to celebrate the birth of the Christ Child. Very different from the frantic pace I left fifty miles away. As I sat in the simplicity of that Amish home, I reflected about another young mother. Two thousand years ago she also accepted her pregnancy and the forthcoming birth of her child as a blessing. Mary was told to call her baby boy Jesus. Amid all of the dynamics of her world, she chose to trust God.

The bread came out of the oven and smelled wonderful. "How many loaves do you need?" She asked. I noticed Katie said "need" not "want." It was an interesting choice of words. "I will take four loaves and share them with my daughters." She said, "It will cool fast if I set it by the window. How many dozen eggs do you need to buy?" "Four dozen will be fine," I said. Katie disappeared into another room and I heard her going down stairs.

I kept thinking about the Christmas story and the Christ Child born by design in a manger. A prominent, prestigious place was not God's plan for the birth of his son. Instead, God chose a lowly birth, in a simple place, with no reservation. "Well, I thought, so much for the ways of the world. A journey of faith and trust was the Christmas requirement."

The babe in the manger would have been warm in humble simplicity. Mary placed her baby in a manger. She wrapped the Son of God in loose clothes and laid him in a feed box. That seems like a tremendous act of trust! The babe wrapped with love and lying in a manger was Jesus, the bread of life! Such an amazing message! Such a simple, amazing message!

I was deep in thought when Katie placed the four loaves of bread and the four dozen eggs on the table. I asked the price and we settled. "You have been thinking," Katie said to me. "Yes," I replied. "The peacefulness of your home makes it easy to think." She asked, "Is there noise where you live?" "Yes," I replied. "There is noise, too much noise, I think."

I walked back to the truck with the fresh bread and the eggs. The firewood was loaded and the bill paid. We headed off for lunch at our favorite Amish restaurant.

On the way home my husband asked, "Are we ready for Christmas?" "Yes," I replied. "We are ready. We will celebrate the birth of Jesus simply and peacefully." I reflect on my encounter with this young Amish mother every December. The reflection keeps me focused on what really matters at a busy time. I doubt that Katie realized what a spiritual blessing she gave to me. Her witness was one of example, an example of life uncluttered with worldly guidance. I witnessed simple trust and faith two weeks before Christmas. A human heart made clear the way for the birth of the Christ Child.



Copyright and Use:

As an ATLAS user, you may print, download, or send articles for individual use according to fair use as defined by U.S. and international copyright law and as otherwise authorized under your respective ATLAS subscriber agreement.

No content may be copied or emailed to multiple sites or publicly posted without the copyright holder(s)' express written permission. Any use, decompiling, reproduction, or distribution of this journal in excess of fair use provisions may be a violation of copyright law.

This journal is made available to you through the ATLAS collection with permission from the copyright holder(s). The copyright holder for an entire issue of a journal typically is the journal owner, who also may own the copyright in each article. However, for certain articles, the author of the article may maintain the copyright in the article. Please contact the copyright holder(s) to request permission to use an article or specific work for any use not covered by the fair use provisions of the copyright laws or covered by your respective ATLAS subscriber agreement. For information regarding the copyright holder(s), please refer to the copyright information in the journal, if available, or contact ATLA to request contact information for the copyright holder(s).

About ATLAS:

The ATLA Serials (ATLAS®) collection contains electronic versions of previously published religion and theology journals reproduced with permission. The ATLAS collection is owned and managed by the American Theological Library Association (ATLA) and received initial funding from Lilly Endowment Inc.

The design and final form of this electronic document is the property of the American Theological Library Association.